



Family Expectations About Drugs & Alcohol

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1. Talk to your teen ahead of time about your family's expectations around drugs and alcohol

Despite appearances, teenagers say that parents are the most important influence when it comes to drugs and alcohol. That's why it's important to talk — and listen — to your teen. A lot.

- **Use blocks of time** such as after dinner, before bedtime, before school or on the drive to or from school and extracurricular activities to talk about drugs and why they're harmful.
- **Take advantage of everyday "teachable moments."** Teachable moments refer to using every day events in your life to point out things you'd like your child to know about.
- **Point out alcohol, tobacco, and drug-related situations** going on in your own neighborhood. If you and your child are at the park and see a group of kids drinking or smoking, use the moment to talk about the negative effects of alcohol and tobacco.
- **Use newspaper headlines or TV news stories as a conversation starter.** The daily news is filled with stories that detail the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse. Talk to your child about the mother who used drugs and was arrested. Who will take care of her baby now? Did she make a good decision when she used drugs?
- **Watch TV with your kids, and ask them what they think.** Do the shows and advertising make drug use look acceptable and routine? Or do they show its downside? How did that program make your child feel about drugs? Write a letter with your child to companies or TV networks about the messages they put out about drugs. Also remember that anti-drug advertising — such as that from the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids is a great kickoff to discussion.
- When discussing outside events — something on TV or in pop culture — **ask open-ended questions**, suggests Dr. Drew, physician, board certified internist and addiction medicine specialist. "What do you think about that?" is a great way to start. It takes the heat off them — and then you have an opportunity to share with them your values, your ideas and educate."
- **Share stories of people in recovery** and stories of those lost to drugs and alcohol. Ask your teen their thoughts and feelings after reading the stories.
- View the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids's Drug Guide (<http://www.drugfree.org/drug-guide>) to learn more about the top drugs in your teen's world. Then ask your teen about these drugs — has he heard of them? What does she know about them? Does anyone in her school use these drugs? Any of her friends? Has she ever been offered a drink or weed?



2. Make a plan

Setting clear boundaries ahead of time will help set expectations. Teens will push back, so it is important to remember that other parents want you to check in with them, and most of us do put a plan in place with our teens.

- “Who is the adult in charge and what is their phone number.”
- “What is going on and who will be there?”
- “When does it end and how are you getting home?”
- “How will you leave if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable?”

3. Consequences for breaking the family’s rules

- “We trust you will abide by our family’s expectations about drugs and alcohol.”
- “What do you think the consequences should be for breaking the house rules?”

The consequences that teens come up with are often more severe than those of their parents, and there is more ownership of the process if they believe they have input into how it works.

4. Talk to the other parents

Other parents are a great resource for support. Most of us want to connect with the families of our children’s friends and have a conversation about creating safe, drug and alcohol-free environments for youth to hang out. If you don’t know the parents well, it can feel intimidating or even foolish to ask questions — but all the surveys indicate parents WANT you to ask...

- “Hi, I am XXX’s mom - I am just calling to check that it’s OK for him/her to come over. What time shall I come get him/her or expect them home?”
- “I feel a little embarrassed asking, but will there be an adult around - I want to make sure there is someone there in case they need help, and to make sure things don’t get out of hand.”
- “We have a pretty clear family policy about substance use - I want to make sure that there is no access to drugs, alcohol, or firearms.”

5. Practice refusal skills

Most young teens think that only ‘mean’ people will give them drugs or alcohol, and don’t realize that it is usually peers or friends who will offer it to them for the first time—and it’s much harder to say “No” to a friend. Sometimes it might be another adult who offers them a drink, saying that it’s “OK, it’s a special celebration,” or “if you are going to drink, it’s better learn/try in a safe place.” Remember giving alcohol to any teen is against the law. Parents who allow teens to drink at parties to try to prevent drunk driving are still breaking the law.

Practicing refusal skills ahead of time can prepare your teen with some preset responses. Once kids walk out the door, they are making their own decisions. You will not be there when they are offered their first opportunity to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. The person who is in the best position to keep a teen safe is him/herself.

Encourage them to pay attention to their instincts, their gut feelings. When those feelings are sending out warning messages and they’ve decided they need to extract themselves from a situation, it can help to have practiced refusal strategies.



Role Play

- Be firm in the response “No, thank you.” “No way” Your body language has to match your words. Make sure there are no mixed messages. Be firm, not wishy-washy. Make eye contact, stand up tall, and use a firm voice. Don’t look at the ground, glance away, show you are nervous, or speak softly.
- “You know, my mom will kill me if I drink. My Mom can smell this stuff a mile away and I’ll get grounded for months. I’d really appreciate it if you’d help me out.”
- If the person won’t let up try turning the tables and ask, “why do you care if I do or don’t”. Be confident in your response.
- Come up with a better idea – “Nah, that doesn’t sound like much fun. Let’s go play video games at my house instead.”
- People don’t like being accused of peer pressuring others, so try stating the obvious, “wow, the peer pressure in this room is pretty strong”, then smile and walk away. Leave – either quietly while no one notices or by making an excuse or joke out of it. “You guys are too crazy for me ...see you later.”
- If the person is giving you a hard time try telling the person, “I respect your choice to do drugs, respect mine not to.”
- If you know you are in a situation where you are likely to be offered alcohol or other drugs, leave before you ever get to that point.

Some kids have such a strong sense of themselves, they have no problem just saying, “no” and getting respect for it. Others will find that recruiting an ally, someone who thinks like they do, will help. Most can use some coaching in how to say “no” in a way that lets them off the hook with their peer group, without being ostracized.

Role play scenarios with them, having them play the part of the kid who is offering the alcohol or other drugs. They will know the kind of language and pressure tactics that might be used by their peers. You play the part of “them,” using the strategies suggested above.

6. Create opportunities to have fun without drugs and alcohol

There are plenty of fun activities for teens to do that do not involve drugs and alcohol - but maybe involve a bit of pre-planning. How about...

- Being “Locked in a Room with a Zombie.” www.roomescapeadventures.com
- Learning to bellydance. www.visionarydance.com
- Tabletop Gaming - Dungeons & Dragons
- Making movies. www.reelgrrls.org
- Making music. www.queerrockcamp.org or www.seattledrumschool.com
- Play Cards against Humanity (only appropriate for older teens)
- Take up a new sport, hobby, try an art class

Or simply be the responsible adult who creates a safe, friendly, and substance use-free environment in your home. Help your kids, and their friends, learn how to have fun, and fight off the dreaded “I’m bored.” Physical games, activities and exercise are extremely important because of the positive physical and mental benefits. The more children are active, the less time they have to get caught up in the pressure from peers.